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SUBJECT: ETHIOPIA: UNMEE OFFICIAL SPECULATES THAT ETHIOPIA
PREPARING TO WITHDRAW FROM ALGIERS AGREEMENTS

Classified By: Political/Economic Chief Michael Gonzales for reasons 1.
4 (b)(d).

11. (S//NF) SUMMARY. On October 23 PolOffs and visiting Desk Officer met with United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE) Head of Addis Ababa Office Joseph Stephanides who expressed his private views on the border issue. Stephanides said he believes that Ethiopia would use Article 60 of the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties legally to justify their withdrawal from the Algiers Agreements. He suggested that Ethiopia's military movements along the border were an attempt by Ethiopia to push the United States into pressuring the Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission (EEBC) to reverse its decision to demarcate the border by coordinates on November 27. Stephanides relayed that both Russian and Chinese officials had told him that Ethiopia had not decided on war yet, but would do so if Prime Minister Meles assessed Eritrean support to anti-GOE insurgents to be a critical threat. Stephanides argued his personal view that the United States should pursue a strategy of "benign neglect" and push the EEBC to postpone demarcation in order to avoid war and allow the status quo to continue. Stephanides said Ethiopian Major General Yohannes Gebremeskel outlined for him a five-phased scenario whereby Ethiopia would intervene militarily in Eritrea, depose President Isaias, and facilitate the establishment of a new Eritrean transition government. Stephanides suggested the United Nations Security Council should review UNMEE's mandate because UNMEE was not capable of monitoring the border. Ethiopian Chief of Defense Staff (CHOD) General Samora Yenus told UNMEE that Eritrea had only enough logistic supplies to last five days in a conflict. While Stephanides and his boss, Ambassador Ennifar, differ on the analysis of the border, Ethiopia is dissatisfied with the EEBC. Post will continue its efforts upon the Ethiopian government to remain engaged in the Algiers Agreements. END SUMMARY.

VIENNA CONVENTION GIVES ETHIOPIA ALGIERS EXIT

12. (S//NF) Stephanides stated that he believes Ethiopia would use Article 60 of the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties to justify legally their withdraw from the Algiers Agreements if the EEBC insisted on demarcation by coordinates in November. (Note: Article 60 states that, "A material breach of a bilateral treaty by one of the parties entitles

the other to invoke the breach as a ground for terminating the treaty or suspending its operation in whole or in part.")

He commented that while the convention would provide the GOE with a basis to pull out, it could not retroactively null the EEBC's boundary decision.

13. (S//NF) He further opined that Ethiopia's military movements along the border were an attempt to impress upon the United States and the EEBC that Ethiopia would pull out unless the EEBC reversed its decision to finalize demarcation on November 27. He underscored his analysis that Ethiopia was not bluffing and would withdraw, but Ethiopia would not attack Eritrea unless Prime Minister Meles received a green light from Washington.

RUSSIANS/CHINESE SAY ETHIOPIA NOT DECIDED ON WAR, YET

14. (S//NF) Stephanides highlighted that both Russian and Chinese officials had told him that if Ethiopia views Eritrea as a real threat, then Ethiopia will move against Isaias regardless of what the international community says. The officials assessed that Prime Meles had not reached that conclusion yet. Stephanides asserted that the Russians and Chinese had better access to Ethiopian intentions than the United States.

A STRATEGY OF "BENIGN NEGLECT" NEEDED

15. (S//NF) Stephanides argued that in his view the United
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States should adopt a strategy of "benign neglect" regarding the Ethiopian-Eritrean border issue by creating conditions for the status quo to continue without taking steps that would risk conflict. He offered that the Security Council should lean on the EEBC to delay or cancel the plan to demarcate the border by geographical coordinates on November 27 to avoid war. He said delaying the EEBC decision would deny Ethiopia a reason to withdraw from the Algiers Agreements before the end of November.

16. (S//NF) In the longer term, Stephanides asserted there was no basis for constructive negotiation with Isaias. Stephanides opined that Isaias would most likely have to be replaced before a peaceful resolution to the impasse could be found. He also added that putting Eritrea on the state sponsor of terrorism list would push Isaias, once and for all into the arms of Iran, Venezuela, and Cuba.

ETHIOPIAN PLAN FOR REGIME CHANGE IN ERITREA?

17. (S//NF) Stephanides relayed the substance of a recent discussion he had had with the Ethiopian military liaison officer to UNMEE, Major General Yohannes Gebremeskel in which Yohannes outlined a potential scenario for an Ethiopian overthrow of the Isaias government if the GOE were provoked into war. Yohannes told Stephanides that Ethiopia knew its army could not stay in Eritrea for long in the event of war, therefore the Ethiopians would conduct a swift military action within a five-phased plan. In phase 1, Ethiopia would promote instability inside Eritrea leading to phase 2 where the Eritrean people would invite the Ethiopians to help them, at which time the Ethiopian military would enter Eritrea and depose Isaias. In phases 3 and 4 the Ethiopians would free the political prisoners and bring in the Eritrean political opposition allowing them to establish a transition government, and in phase 5 the Ethiopian military would withdraw.

"UNMEE A CHARADE"

18. (S//NF) Stephanides said that UNMEE was a "charade" because it could monitor almost nothing along the border as a result of Eritrean restrictions. He suggested that the mission's mandate should be reviewed when it comes up for renewal to determine what the Security Council expects UNMEE to be able to accomplish.

SAMORA ON ERITREAN MILITARY READINESS

19. (S//NF) Ethiopian CHOD General Samora Yonus told senior UNMEE officials the week of October 15 that the Eritrean military had only enough logistic stockpiles and munitions to last five days in a war, according to Stephanides. Stephanides commented that the Ethiopians have assessed that any war will be a short one.

COMMENT

10. (S//NF) The views expressed by Stephanides during the meeting are his own and may not be shared by his boss Acting Special Representative of the Secretary General Azouz Ennifar. Both do not see eye to eye on the border. Ethiopia's September 24, 2007 Aide-Memoire to the Security Council--which accompanied Ethiopia's notification to Eritrea that Asmara was in material breach of the Algiers Agreements--identified the Vienna convention as justification for Ethiopia's potential withdraw from the Agreements. While Ethiopia may consider withdrawing from the EEBC process, GoE officials have told Post that Ethiopia's letter to the Security Council should not be interpreted as a threat that it would pull out of the Algiers Agreements. As both Ethiopia and Eritrea have now notified the UN that they would

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not view the EEBC's demarcation by geographical coordinates as a legal demarcation, should the EEBC go forward with such an act and both parties reject it, it could provide conditions where the EEBC declares its mandate complete and an opening appears for the UN or other mechanism to work with the parties on a mutually-acceptable resolution. In any event, Post will continue to impress upon the highest levels of the host government the need to respect the Algiers Agreements. END COMMENT.
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